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ABSTRACT

The summary information in this report provides teachers, school administrators, and students with an overview of results from the June 1998 administration of the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination given in Alberta, Canada. The report first notes that the examination consists of 60 multiple-choice questions worth 60% and four writing assignments worth 40% of the total examination mark. The report states that overall student achievement in Social Studies 33 was satisfactory. Out of the 7,345 students who wrote the examination, 89.5% of the students achieved the acceptable standard, while 4.8% of the students achieved the standard of excellence. The report then focuses on the multiple-choice questions, and four different writing assignments. (BT)

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Social Studies 33, Diploma Examination Results. Examiners' Report for June 1998.

Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Student Evaluation Branch.

SO 029 962

C. Andrews

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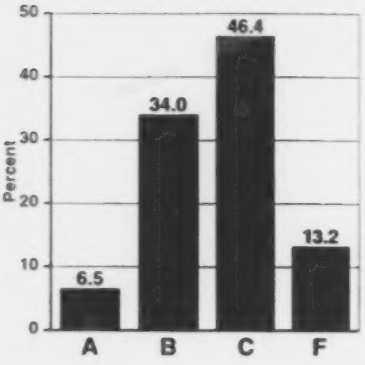
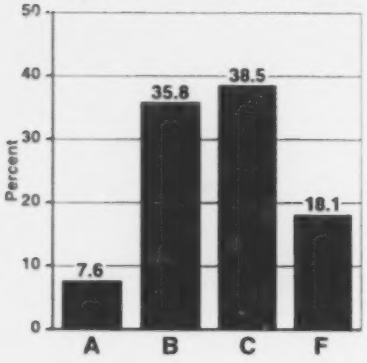
Social Studies 33

Diploma Examination Results
Examiners' Report for June 1998

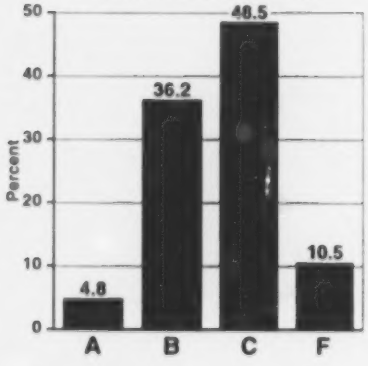
School-Awarded Mark



Diploma Examination Mark



Final Course Mark



The summary information in this report provides teachers, school administrators, and students with an overview of results from the June 1998 administration of the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination. This information is most helpful when used in conjunction with the detailed school and jurisdiction reports that are provided electronically to schools and school jurisdiction offices. A provincial report containing a detailed analysis of the combined January, April, June, and August results is made available annually.

Description of the Examination

The Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination consists of 60 multiple-choice questions worth 60% and four writing assignments worth 40% of the total examination mark.

Achievement of Standards

The information reported is based on the final course marks achieved by 7 345 students who wrote the June 1998 examination.

- 89.5% of these students achieved the acceptable standard (a final course mark of 50% or higher).
- 4.8% of these students achieved the standard of excellence (a final course mark of 80% or higher).

Overall, student achievement in Social Studies 33 was satisfactory. Students demonstrated a good understanding of Social Studies knowledge and skills on the multiple-choice questions; however, the writing assignments presented greater difficulty for many students. The average score on the writing assignments was significantly lower than the average score on the multiple-choice questions.

Provincial Averages

- The average school-awarded mark was 61.1%.
- The average diploma examination mark was 61.5%.
- The average final course mark, representing an equal weighting of the school-awarded mark and the diploma examination mark, was 61.7%.

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Multiple-Choice Questions

Examination Blueprint

There are 60 multiple-choice questions that are each worth one mark. Questions are classified in two ways: according to the curricular content area (topic) being tested and according to the knowledge and skill objectives required to answer the question. The examination blueprint illustrates the distribution of questions in June 1998 according to these classifications.

All questions on the diploma examination require students to demonstrate knowledge of social studies content and to apply social studies skills to that knowledge base. The reporting categories below define the general types of questions that appear on the examination and the categories for which information is reported.

		Question Classification by Topic		Total Questions
		Topic A: Political and Economic Systems	**Topic B: Global Interaction in the 20th Century**	
		Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the world's political and economic systems as outlined in the *Program of Studies*.	Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the interaction of nations since 1918 as outlined in the *Program of Studies*.	
Question Classification by Knowledge and Skill Objectives	**Understanding Information and Ideas** These questions require students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of generalizations, key concepts, and related facts and content.	31, 32, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46, 47, 50, 52, 54, 55, 56	1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 21, 22, 27	29
	Interpreting Information and Ideas These questions require students to use their understanding of social studies to analyze and interpret information and ideas.	33, 36, 42, 44, 48, 51, 53, 57, 58, 59	3, 4, 6, 9, 13, 14, 16, 23, 25, 28, 29	21
	Applying Information and Ideas These questions require students to demonstrate their understanding of social studies by applying information and ideas.	34, 45, 49, 60	17, 19, 20, 24, 26, 30	10
	Total Questions	**30**	**30**	**60**

*Subtest Results**

Results are reported in average raw scores. Total of all multiple-choice questions: 39.6 out of 60

by Topic

- Political and Economic Systems: 19.0 out of 30
- Global Interaction in the 20th Century: 20.6 out of 30

by Knowledge and Skill Objectives

- Understanding Information and Ideas: 19.0 out of 29
- Interpreting Information and Ideas: 14.2 out of 21
- Applying Information and Ideas: 6.4 out of 10

*Readers are cautioned **not** to compare subtest results because the subtests are not of equal difficulty. Instead, readers should compare these provincial subtest results with their own school results.

Question-by-Question Results

Question	Key	Difficulty*
1	D	86.7
2	B	74.7
3	A	83.5
4	B	68.3
5	D	88.2
6	B	69.4
7	C	68.9
8	D	63.5
9	C	69.1
10	C	64.2
11	B	66.7
12	D	75.1
13	B	55.1
14	A	53.0
15	A	67.8
16	B	74.4
17	A	73.1
18	C	73.8
19	C	59.9
20	D	52.3
21	D	72.1
22	A	59.5
23	B	64.6
24	C	65.1
25	B	84.2
26	C	61.7
27	A	75.9
28	B	69.2
29	A	69.4
30	C	49.5
31	C	86.5
32	A	56.5
33	C	56.9
34	B	61.0
35	D	39.6
36	A	59.3
37	D	64.7
38	A	56.9
39	C	84.0
40	D	51.8
41	C	58.4
42	B	58.4
43	D	56.5
44	C	78.7
45	B	63.9
46	D	86.1
47	A	66.3
48	B	85.1
49	A	66.8
50	C	46.4
51	A	72.5
52	D	40.8
53	B	59.0
54	D	53.4
55	C	60.2
56	D	56.8
57	A	77.1
58	B	70.5
59	B	42.9
60	A	81.6

*Difficulty—percentage of students answering the question correctly

The table at the left shows question-by-question results and the keyed answers. Parallel tables in the school and jurisdiction reports show the percentage of students who selected each alternative. By comparing school and jurisdiction results with provincial results presented here, teachers can determine areas of strength and weakness in the achievement of their students and, consequently, areas of potential strength and weakness in their programs.

Examiners' Comments

The multiple-choice questions require students to go beyond simply recalling information to apply their knowledge and thinking skills. Students must demonstrate that they understand social studies concepts; that they comprehend historical, political, and economic relationships; and that they can interpret and evaluate social studies information and ideas. Markers generally expressed positive comments about the multiple-choice questions, suggesting that the questions set a fair and appropriate standard.

The following table gives results for six questions selected from the examination. The table shows the percentage of students, in five groups, that answered each question correctly. The comments on pages 4 and 5 discuss some of the decisions that students may have made and some of the skills they may have used to answer these questions correctly.

Percentage of Students Correctly Answering Selected Multiple-Choice Questions

Student Group	Question Number 5	23	24	35	53	57
All students	88.2	64.6	65.1	39.6	59.0	77.1
Students achieving the *standard of excellence* (80% or higher, or A) on the whole examination	99.1	83.6	89.8	53.0	91.3	96.4
Students achieving the *acceptable standard* who received marks between 65% and 79%, or B, on the whole examination	97.5	72.8	79.6	44.8	73.9	92.5
Students achieving the *acceptable standard* who received marks between 50% and 64%, or C, on the whole examination	89.2	61.6	59.2	37.4	50.4	74.9
Students who have not achieved the *acceptable standard* (49% or less) on the whole examination	62.9	46.9	38.7	28.5	34.7	43.4

5. The Nazi party in Germany gained popularity during the early 1930s by promising to

   A. withdraw from the League of Nations and prepare for war with Great Britain
   B. end economic links with the United States and annex Austria
   C. cut military spending and form an alliance with France
   *D. reduce unemployment and restore national pride

Question 5 was the easiest multiple-choice question on the examination, with 88.2% of students selecting the correct alternative. Among students achieving the standard of excellence, 99.1% chose the correct response. Even among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard, the correct response was selected by 62.9%.

The high success rate for this question demonstrates that students in Alberta have a clear understanding of not only the circumstances regarding the rise of Nazism in Germany but also of the economic conditions in Germany during the early 1930s. Interestingly, not a single student among those students achieving the standard of excellence selected alternative C yet this was the most commonly selected incorrect alternative for those students who did not achieve the acceptable standard.

Use the following cartoon to answer questions 23 and 24.

—from *Best Editorial Cartoons of 1994*

23. This cartoon suggests that the "European Community" (now known as the European Union or EU) has failed to

   A. adapt to the collapse of centrally planned economies in Eastern Europe
   B. prevent military conflicts among Western European nations
   C. understand the importance of improved international trade
   *D. recognize the existence of ethnic conflict in Europe

24. Which of the following headlines relates to the problem suggested by the cartoon?

   A. Norway hosts NATO military exercises
   B. Channel Tunnel opens between France and England
   *C. Turkish workers in Germany attacked by neo-Nazis
   D. Prime Minister of Italy caught in corruption scandal

Questions 23 and 24 offer an interesting contrast in achievement. On the surface, the questions appear to be of virtually identical difficulty with 64.6% of students selecting the correct alternative for question 23 and 65.1% of students selecting the correct response for question 24. Student performance does differ, however, when a more detailed examination of achievement by each sub-group is carried out.

Students who achieved the standard of excellence performed very well on both questions (83.6% correctly answered question 23 and 89.8% correctly answered question 24). Student success, as is typical, declined among subsequent subgroups. Question 24 more strongly discriminated among higher and lower achieving students than did question 23. This difference between the two questions demonstrates how two questions that appear to be of the same difficulty, can actually have differing effects on student sub-groups.

These results may be best attributed to the nature of the two questions. Question 23 requires students to interpret the message conveyed by the cartoon. This task was more easily done than the task in question 24, which asked students to apply the message of the cartoon to contemporary global events. High-achieving students, as a group, actually found the task in question 23 more difficult than the task in question 24, yet the reverse was true among the low achieving students.

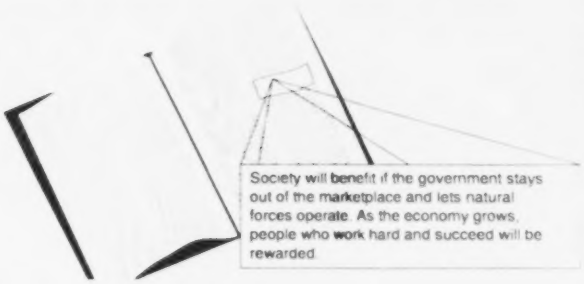
35. Since the late 1980s, efforts to rewrite the Canadian Constitution have resulted in

A. no change because proposals were not approved by the Governor General
B. sweeping change in the power of the Senate to veto legislation
C. sweeping changes to the civil liberties guaranteed to citizens
*D. no change because of a lack of national agreement

Question 35 was the most difficult question on the June 1998 examination, with 39.6% of students selecting the correct alternative. Furthermore, the question did not strongly discriminate among sub-groups (53.0% of the students achieving the standard of excellence selected the correct response, while 28.5% of the students who did not achieve the acceptable standard selected the correct response). Among all sub-groups, choice C was the most popularly selected incorrect alternative, attracting about 30% of respondents.

The low achievement on this question and strong appeal of alternative C among all students indicates that many students may have made a selection based on widely held public perceptions, rather than on the basis of learned information regarding constitutional reform in Canada. In recent months, there has been a great deal of media attention paid to several landmark human rights decisions. Current affairs may have influenced student thinking regarding constitutional reform, and drawn some students away from the correct alternative.

Use the following illustration to answer question 53.


Society will benefit if the government stays out of the marketplace and lets natural forces operate. As the economy grows, people who work hard and succeed will be rewarded.

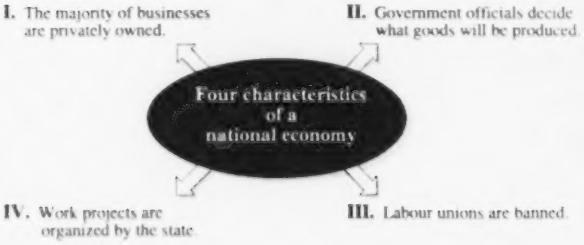
53. The author of this book would support the economic ideas of

A. Karl Marx
*B. Adam Smith
C. Vladimir Lenin
D. Franklin D. Roosevelt

Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard demonstrated confusion on **question 53**. Overall, this question was moderately difficult (59.0% of all students selected the correct alternative); however, among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard, only 34.7% chose the correct alternative as compared with 91.3% of students who achieved the standard of excellence.

The most commonly chosen alternative among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard was alternative A, selected by 41.8% of this sub-group. Considering the statement provided in the source, it is difficult to imagine how, logically, alternative A could have been appealing; however, the phenomenon of name recognition may have played a role. It is most likely that students are exposed to the ideas of Karl Marx and Adam Smith when they are taught the economic ideologies of this century. Evidently, many of the low-achieving students recall that both persons were economic philosophers but are confused as to which person was a capitalist supporter and which was the founder of communism. It is troubling, though, to think that a significant proportion of students have difficulty differentiating between such distinct economic ideological foundations.

Use the following information to answer question 57.


I. The majority of businesses are privately owned.
II. Government officials decide what goods will be produced.
Four characteristics of a national economy
III. Labour unions are banned.
IV. Work projects are organized by the state.

57. Which characteristic would have been **unacceptable** under the government of Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union?

*A. Characteristic I
B. Characteristic II
C. Characteristic III
D. Characteristic IV

Question 57 was relatively easy (77.1% of students selected the correct alternative). Among students who achieved the standard of excellence, 96.4% selected the correct alternative. The question discriminated between high- and low-achieving sub-groups very strongly. Among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard, 43.4% selected the correct alternative. To the credit of this group, their next most popular choice was alternative C. It holds some credibility as an answer given the historical links between labour movements and socialist ideologies. This choice is incorrect, however, given the reference in the stem of the question to the Stalinist Soviet Union. The appeal of alternative C was not isolated to the low-achieving sub-group, as it was also the second most popular alternative for three of the four student sub-groups, including the highest achieving students. As an instructional tool, this question demonstrates the need for students to understand the differences between communism in theory and communism in practice.

Writing Assignments

The Social Studies 33 examination contains four writing assignments interspersed throughout the examination. Each assignment is related to a specific curricular theme and assesses several skills. Teachers will find the written-response results most meaningful in the context of the assignments and the scoring descriptors.

The scoring criteria used to evaluate student performance are the same for each assignment. These criteria are found on pages 31 and 32 of the 1997–98 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin, Diploma Examinations Program*. In consultation with teachers serving as standard confirmers for the marking of the 1997 writing assignments, minor changes were made to the descriptors from those presented in the 1996–97 bulletin.

The table below outlines the requirements for each assignment, the categories for scoring each assignment, the amount each category contributes to the total mark of the examination, and the percentage of students achieving at the various levels. In June 1998, the average raw score for the writing assignment section of the examination was 21.9 out of 40.

The most useful starting place for reviewing the results is at the **Satisfactory 3** level. Such work exceeds the pass mark of 50%.

Examination Blueprint and Percentage Distribution of Scores

Description of the Writing Assignment*	Scoring Category	Proportion of Total Mark(%)	Percentage Distribution of Scores									
			Excellent		Competent		Satisfactory		Limited		Poor	
			5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1	Ins**
Writing Assignment I Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.4	2.0	7.3	9.1	20.1	17.2	22.1	9.1	6.7	5.1
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.8	2.2	8.8	12.5	36.2	17.3	11.8	3.0	1.4	5.1
Writing Assignment II Comprehension of Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.9	2.8	10.0	15.4	32.2	19.1	13.5	2.5	1.0	0.6
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	2.1	3.0	10.5	16.7	41.6	15.5	8.3	1.3	0.5	0.6
Writing Assignment III Interpretation of Visual Images	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.6	2.2	8.6	12.1	24.9	18.4	17.9	5.9	4.4	4.0
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.8	2.2	9.0	13.2	39.1	16.4	10.7	2.4	1.4	4.0
Writing Assignment IV Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	0.9	1.5	6.4	10.1	27.4	20.9	20.9	6.1	2.8	3.2
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.1	1.9	6.9	11.9	41.9	17.1	12.0	2.6	1.3	3.2

* See pages 20 and 21 of the 1997–98 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin* for a description of the Writing Assignments.

** **Ins** (Insufficient) is a special category that includes students who did not attempt the assignment, who wrote too little to evaluate, or who wrote answers that were completely off topic.

Note: The shaded portion represents the percentage of students who achieved or exceeded the acceptable standard. Students with scores of 4, 4.5, and/or 5 have achieved the standard of excellence.

Examiners' Comments

The June 1998 diploma examination provided many insights into the ability of students in Social Studies 33 to apply and communicate knowledge and ideas in written form. After six administrations, there is evidence of improvement in students' written work. In January 1996, the mean score on the written portion of the examination was 20.7 out of 40. On the June 1998 examination, the mean score was 21.9 out of 40. Reports from schools and markers indicate that the examination was completed in the allotted time. The majority of students completed all writing assignments.

Writing Assignment I: Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts

Writing Assignment I required students to recall specific course content to answer the question: *How did the United States and the Soviet Union manage to avoid a third world war?*

Even though this was the first written-response question, this assignment had the highest insufficient rate of any writing assignment on the June 1998 examination with 5.1% of students receiving an INS. Further, only 57.1% of students received a score of satisfactory or higher on the *Ideas and Support* scoring category. These results illustrate how difficult students found the assignment. Markers were, in general, concerned by the lack of understanding of the history of the Cold War period demonstrated by many students.

A common concern of markers was that many of the students who did not achieve the acceptable standard provided over-simplified and superficial discussions of one or several Cold War events without establishing a clear connection to the specific assignment question. Many of these students relied heavily on the use of information in the multiple-choice questions to string together this information into a largely "cribbed" composition.

Students who achieved **Satisfactory** generally demonstrated a basic understanding of the strategies employed by the superpowers during the Cold War to avoid a military confrontation. Probably because of its historic profile, and references in the multiple-choice section of the examination, it was very common for these students to focus on the example of the Cuban Crisis of 1962 to demonstrate how war was averted.

Students achieving **Competent** and **Excellent** clearly understood the assigned task and offered compositions with thoughtful discussions of several strategies used by the superpowers to avoid war. Many of these writers were able to effectively use social studies terminology to describe strategies; in addition, they selected historic events to demonstrate such strategies in practical use.

Writing Assignment II: Contemporary Issues

Writing Assignment II is preceded by a fictitious newspaper article that describes a proposal for the inclusion of nuclear weapons in Canada's defence system. Students were expected to compose a letter responding to the question: *Should Canada acquire nuclear weapons? Why or why not?*

Writing Assignment II was the easiest assignment on the June 1998 examination. Only 0.6% of students received an insufficient grade on this task; furthermore, 82.4% of students achieved a mark of satisfactory or higher on the *Ideas and Support* scoring category. Markers were pleased with these results and felt the success of this question was related to the personal engagement many students had with the question. Despite the success of students, markers noted that one disappointing aspect of student writing was that very few students mentioned the testing of nuclear devices by both India and Pakistan focused on in the news media in the month prior to the examination.

Typically, students who achieved **Satisfactory** or less based their argumentation on emotions. The majority of these writers opposed the proposal for acquiring nuclear weapons; however, they were less likely to discuss the practical problems created for Canada.

A problem that has occurred on previous examinations again emerged among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard. These students depended on written information provided in the fictitious newspaper article, although it was evident that many of them understood the assigned task and were emotionally attached to the issue. Many made only a minimal attempt to develop their letters with their own thoughts.

Students who achieved **Competent** and **Excellent** composed letters that were often a blend of an emotional response combined with a discussion of the real-world consequences of a decision to obtain a nuclear arsenal. Some students at this level chose to support the acquisition of nuclear weapons, arguing that there would be economic benefits for Canada's defence industry, and/or that nuclear weapons would give Canada greater military credibility thereby acting as a deterrent to aggressors. Many students, in arguing against nuclear weapons, focussed on the damage that would be done to Canada's international reputation and the possibility of economic sanctions being applied by other nations.

Writing Assignment III: Interpreting Visual Images

This writing assignment required students to respond to two photographs by discussing the ideas that the images communicate. The photographs were of Adolf Hitler speaking at a Nazi rally and a scene of debate from the Canadian House of Commons. Students were asked to respond to the question: *What do the photographs communicate to you about the differences in the roles of citizens in dictatorial and democratic political systems*?

Students found this assignment moderately difficult. The insufficient rate was 4.0%; however, 67.8% of students achieved a mark of satisfactory or higher on the *Ideas and Support* scoring category. Further, 81.7% of students achieved a mark of satisfactory or higher on the *Communication of Ideas* scoring category. The different rates of success for the two scoring categories is not unique to this question, but it is typical of all four assignments on the examination. This indicates that even when students struggle with the topic under discussion, they are able to demonstrate good communication skills.

A typical response among students achieving **Satisfactory** for this assignment was to address the question by discussing the messages created by each photograph, and then to discuss the overall message developed by the combination of images. Students at this level of achievement were able to focus on the differing roles of citizens.

Among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard it was very common to lose focus when writing and to simply discuss the general differences between a democracy and a dictatorship with little or no reference to the role of citizens.

Students who achieved **Competent or Excellent** provided insightful compositions focussed on the differing roles of citizens in the contrasting political systems of democracy and dictatorship. Some writers demonstrated their knowledge without specific reference to the visual images, but rather were stimulated to write by the messages the images conveyed. Others chose to include a discussion of revealing details in each of the photographs, as well as the overall messages.

Writing Assignment IV: Contemporary Issues

The final writing assignment on the June 1998 examination is preceded by a source page on which four candidates for political office discuss a contemporary issue. The question asked of students was: *Based on the candidates' responses to the question* ***"What should the federal government do about the national debt?"*** *who would get your vote? Why?*

Results for this assignment were very similar to those for Writing Assignment III. The insufficient rate was 3.2% while 67.2% of students achieved a mark of satisfactory or higher on the *Ideas and Support* scoring category. For the *Communication of Ideas* scoring category, 80.8% of students achieved a mark of satisfactory or higher. Many markers expressed satisfaction that a large proportion of the students were aware of the difference between a deficit and a debt.

It was typical for students achieving **Satisfactory** to offer a composition that was a mixture of their own ideas and copied ideas from the source. At this level of achievement, students were aware of the need to prioritize government spending but were not able to integrate and apply social studies vocabulary.

Students who achieved **Competent and Excellent** offered their insights to justify their choice of a political candidate. These writers were well aware of the debt situation in Canada. Many writers at this level expressed concerns regarding the need to preserve social programs in the face of budgetary restrictions necessitated by efforts to pay down the debt.

Among students who did not achieve the acceptable standard, many were not able to add much to the dialogue of the four candidates. Instead they chose to simply declare that they "agreed with everything said by Candidate 'X'." Among the low-achieving students, there was obvious confusion about the debt issue and how it impacts citizens.

For further information, contact Tim Coates (tcoates@edc.gov.ab.ca) or Elana Scraba (escraba@edc.gov.ab.ca) at the Student Evaluation Branch, 427-0010. To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton, dial 310-0000.

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